



# I. Obtaining Your Student (F-1) VISA

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION—PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Most foreign nationals wishing to enter the United States are required to have a visa.

A visa is an official notation (usually a stamp) that is affixed or stamped in your passport that designates the purpose and valid dates for entry into the United States. Visas are obtained at U.S. embassies or consulates located in foreign countries. Rules and procedures for obtaining visas may vary from one country to another depending on diplomatic or reciprocity agreements with a particular country or other immigration issues relating to that country. The visa will contain information specific to your visa's conditions including the allowable number of entries and a designated expiration date.

People who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents and plan to enter the United States for the purpose of study are required to have a student visa. While there are several categories of visas that will allow an individual to study, most students who attend Knox College will require the F-1 Student Visa. This information is primarily for students requiring this visa.

## FORM I-20: CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR NONIMMIGRANT (F-1) STUDENT STATUS

This is a document issued by a school approved by the U.S. Department of State for receiving foreign students. The I-20 certifies that the student has been accepted for admission and meets the government required conditions of eligibility for nonimmigrant student status. This document is required to apply for a student visa to enter and exit the United States during the program of study or to transfer from one school to another. The I-20 document is unique to the student and the school that issues it. **Check your I-20 to be sure the information is correct and that your name is the same as it appears in your passport.** The number on the upper-left corner above your name is your SEVIS number for Knox College. Report any errors as soon as possible to the Office of Admission at Knox College.

## FORM I-94: ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE RECORD

The I-94 is a record of your entry into and departure from the United States. It contains important information: your name, birth date, country of citizenship, the arrival/departure number (very important), the date of your most recent entry into the United States, and the type of entry visa used to enter the country. The I-94 is an important document used to establish legal status while in the United States. In recent years, the I-94 has become automated, and you can print your I-94 record on the internet after entering the United States. In some special circumstances, however, you may receive a paper I-94 when you enter the United States. If you do receive a paper I-94 (which is a small white card), we recommend stapling it to a page in your passport. It is very important not to lose this card.

## F-1 STUDENT STATUS

Please note that a visa is used only for entry into the United States and can be granted only at embassies or consulate offices located outside the United States. Once you have been admitted to the United States, you will be granted an "immigration status" consistent with the type of visa used to enter the country. To maintain that status, you must adhere to the conditions for the designated status.

If you subsequently apply for and are granted a change of status, the new status will be noted on the I-94. (Submission of your passport and I-94 is required with a petition for any change of status.) You will then be subject to conditions associated with the new status.

Your visa does not need to remain valid once you have entered the United States. (The expiration date of the visa applies only to the time allowed to enter or re-enter the United States in the designated status. If the visa expiration occurs while you are in the United States, it means that if you leave the country, you would need to renew your visa to re-enter.) However, your SEVIS record (I-20) and I-94 must be updated and maintained to reflect ongoing valid immigration status.

To maintain your status, you must:

- Have a passport that is kept valid at all times.
- Attend, at least initially, the school for which the visa was issued.
- Register for a full course of study every semester/term. (A full course load at Knox is three courses in each of the three terms in an academic year.)
- Follow certain procedures to continue from one education level to another, or to transfer to another school.
- Limit on-campus employment to 20 hours per week during academic sessions. Schools may have a lower limit on campus employment. Knox College limits campus employment to 10 hours per week during academic terms. However, up to 40 hours per week of campus employment is allowed between academic terms and during the summer.
- Refrain from off-campus employment without authorization.
- Report change of address to the designated school official within 10 days of the change.
- Obtain required authorization for extension of stay, employment, or training programs.

Failure to comply with immigration regulations will retroactively place you out of status and in violation of U.S. immigration laws. Students who fall out of status must apply for reinstatement and will likely be asked to leave the country and re-enter with new documentation. They also may be barred from re-entry for a period of three years or longer if an immigration judge or the service finds them in violation.

## **SEVIS AND SEVP**

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is an internet based system used by the U.S. government, and is administered by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to track issuance of I-20s, arrivals and departures, as well as continued enrollment, practical training, and other related activities of F-1 visa holders. All I-20s are generated in the SEVIS system and are specific to the schools certifying the students as acceptable to their institution.

Please note that a student may be issued separate I-20s from several schools, but once a student uses a particular school's I-20 to apply for a visa, all other school I-20s will become invalid and only the SEVIS record used to obtain the visa will remain valid.

If you change schools after initial attendance at the designated school, your unique SEVIS record will need to be transferred to the new school. Your SEVIS record with its unique SEVIS number will remain with you until completion of your stay as a student. However, if you leave the country and interrupt your studies for an extended period (more than 5 months), a new SEVIS record will need to be issued.

## **DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIALS (DSO)**

Alex Pia, director of international student services, is the designated school official at Knox College and can be reached at [apia@knox.edu](mailto:apia@knox.edu) or by phone at +1-309-341-7538. He has access to SEVIS records and is authorized to submit requests for I-20s. Let him know if there are any changes in your contact information, change of program, need for authorization for travel, or special circumstances that may impact the maintenance of your student status. Other designated school officials at Knox are Bruce Rash ([brash@knox.edu](mailto:brash@knox.edu), +1-309-341-7673) and Paul Steenis ([psteen@knox.edu](mailto:psteen@knox.edu), +1-309-341-7145).

## **TRANSFERRING SCHOOLS WITHIN THE UNITED STATES**

If you wish to transfer schools before completing your designated course of study, you must first notify a DSO at Knox of your intent to transfer, providing any information required for release of your I-20. The DSO at Knox will need to revise your record in SEVIS, designate the new school, and provide a release date. The SEVIS system will alert the new school that your SEVIS record has been transferred at which time the DSO at the new school will be able to access your record, revise it, and issue a new I-20 either prior to or after you arrive at the new school. You are required to contact the DSO at the new school within 15 days of the program start date indicated on the new I-20 to confirm the transfer in the SEVIS system.

## **TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES**

Whenever you plan to leave the United States, you must consult with the International Student Advisor (DSO) in the Office of International Student Services and either obtain a new I-20 or have the current one endorsed (signed) for travel at least two weeks before the travel date.

If you wish to travel outside the United States during term breaks, you should seek endorsement before the break. You should also remember that for re-entry you must have a valid visa and a passport valid for at least six months. If you were issued a one-time entry or have an expired visa, you will need to renew your visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad in order to re-enter the United States. If your passport is within six months of expiration, you may need to renew your passport as well.

When you arrive at the port of entry to the United States for re-entry, you will need to present your travel documents for inspection just as required for initial entry.

## **TRAVEL TO AND FROM CANADA, MEXICO, AND NEIGHBORING ISLANDS**

Travel to these destinations is handled differently than travel to other countries. A valid passport is required for entry to Canada. Students from certain countries will need a Canadian entry visa to enter Canada and should check with the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. before traveling to Canada ([www.canadainternational.gc.ca](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca)). If you plan to travel for fewer than 30 days to Canada, Mexico, or neighboring islands (Bermuda, Bahamas, and all Caribbean islands except Cuba), you may be able to re-enter the United States even if the visa in your passport has expired provided you have a valid I-94 and endorsed I-20. You should check with the International Student Advisor at Knox before departure.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more detailed information about applying for a visa and paying the required I-901 SEVIS fee, see the accompanying instructions and references to links at the Department of State website (<https://educationusa.state.gov>). Please note that the instructions on page three of your I-20 do not reflect recent changes in procedures. Consult your local U.S. Embassy, the SEVIS website, or the Office of Admission at Knox College for up-to-date information and instructions.

If you have questions, please contact Alex Pia, director of international student services at Knox College, at [apia@knox.edu](mailto:apia@knox.edu) or by phone at +1-309-341-7538.